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ABSTRACT

This paper describes and presents the results of an exploratory study of six Vietnamese American students who attended an English-as-a-Second-Language class during their first year of study at Drexel University in Pennsylvania. The paper addresses the issue of the growing variety of cultures represented in today's college students by examining what these six Vietnamese students' experiences are, in and out of the classroom. Descriptions of the freshman English program at Drexel University, the fall semester composition course, and the classes that were observed in the study are provided. Among the study's findings are the following: (1) formal education is viewed as an avenue to middle-class occupational status; (2) the parents of these students reject the goal of total assimilation into American culture and guard against these pressures; (3) strained family relationships occur due to different rates of acculturation by family members; (4) there appears to have been a conscious or unconscious rejection of their own culture and language to some extent as the students try to "fit in;" and (5) there is a need to bond together with those of their own kind as security from the pressures imposed by the different cultural structures. Conclusions and recommendations are provided. Contains a 6-item bibliography and 12 notes. (GLR)

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VIETNAMESE STUDENTS AT DREXEL UNIVERSITY: AN EXPLORATORY FIELD STUDY

by

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and

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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VIETNAMESE STUDENTS AT DREXEL UNIVERSITY: AN EXPLORATORY FIELD STUDY

Jon Phillips and Kelly Stevens

Jon Phillips and Kelly Stevens worked collaboratively to carry out a field study of a group of first year undergraduate students enrolled at Temple University. All of these students use English as a Second Language and were accepted to Temple on the condition that they take two semesters of ESL classes to improve their academic reading and writing skills. As a result of our having taught in the program we became interested in this particular group of students because many of them arrived in this country as children and are the first generation of Southeast Asian refugees to be socialized by the American high school system. We were interested in examining the following:

1. The literacy beliefs, practices and processes of this group of learners both at school and within their communities.

2. Their attitudes toward their first language and culture and how they resolve possible conflicts between the expectations of their culture with peer group norms.

The required ESL courses as they presently exist at Temple are based on traditional methods of teaching reading and writing skills for academic purposes using prescribed textbooks. As a result of our investigation into the literacy practices and processes of this group of learners we suggest some recommendations concerning alternative ways to design the course. These recommendations are based on our assumptions about teaching and learning, approaching learning from a holistic view point.

At the same time, we wanted our recommendations to meet the stated academic objectives for the ESL program at Temple. Therefore, this project attempts to practically resolve some key questions regarding the feasibility of teaching reading and writing for academic purposes within an ideological concept of literacy.

Project Outline

1. Comprehensive description of the target population, including a discussion of their backgrounds, community life and future goals.
2. Description/discussion of the existing ESL program for academic purposes at Temple and a rationale for changing the present curriculum.
3. Practical suggestions for "Whole Language" approach for meeting the academic objectives of the program.

Introduction

In the second chapter of her book, The Social Construction of Literacy, Jenny Cook-Gumperz describes the historical changes in the access to education and literacy skills from the 18th to the 20th century, both in Britain and the United States. In the 18th century, education and literacy were reserved for an elite group who felt that it would be dangerous to allow the lower classes access to these privileges. They were afraid that reading would make the underclass discontented with their lives. However, as public education became more accepted and literacy rates grew during the industrial revolution, schooling came to be seen as a major socializing, rather than a destabilizing force, to prepare the lower classes to work efficiently in factories, and illiteracy rather than literacy came to be seen as a threat to the social order.

This issue of who has access to education is still important today. Although historically America has a tradition of public education and greater access to higher education whereas Britain has maintained a more elitist view, American universities and the tradition of a liberal arts education, for the most part, have been regarded as a privilege reserved for academically talented students.

Recently, perhaps both for economic and demographic reasons, universities in the U.S. have increasingly been opening their doors to a wider variety of students, altering the student make up of colleges and universities across the

United States. As the number of college age students declines after the bulge of the baby boom era, schools are forced both to compete for good students and lower their standards in order to maintain student numbers. This new, more varied student body has posed new challenges, especially for urban universities where many students do not speak English as a native language. Universities have lowered entrance scores in the hope that with some remedial work, most students will be brought up to college level standards during their freshman year. Schools like Drexel University have been forced to develop new programs to deal with the special needs of their changing student body. A Learning Center which helps both native and non-native speakers improve their reading and study skills and a Writing Center to help non-native speaking students with academic papers are just two examples of new "remedial" programs at Drexel designed to address the special needs of these new students.

But who are these new students and what are their special needs? This was one of the questions we posed after first encountering these students at Temple University. At both Temple and Drexel many are foreign students and some are native speakers whose reading and writing skills are not yet up to academic standards. Temple, like many universities, has a profit-making English language center affiliated with the university. This program offers English courses to prepare foreign students to enter colleges and

universities. The assumption is that foreign students' academic skills are excellent and that only their language skills need improvement. Once these students are accepted into the university, they are expected to perform up to the standards of native speakers and usually do not receive additional "remedial" attention. On the other hand, native speakers with low academic skills are often accepted to the university, perhaps on a probationary basis, and placed in special, sometimes non-credit English courses to improve their reading and writing skills before being allowed to matriculate as full-time students.

But there is a third group of students who fall somewhere between the foreign students and the native speakers. These are students whose native language is not English but who have lived most of their lives in this country. Unlike the foreign students, who have a well established cultural identity and who will eventually return to their home countries, this third group of students, often children of first generation immigrants and refugees, do not have a clear cultural identity. Most of these students both at Temple and at Drexel are originally from either Puerto Rico or from Southeast Asian countries such as Vietnam and Cambodia. We are especially interested in the latter group because, unlike the Puerto Rican students who frequently return to their home country, the Southeast Asian students, both because of distance and politics, will probably never

return "home" and indeed must begin thinking of America as their new home.

We are also particularly interested in the students from Southeast Asia because of our own experiences in Indonesia and Thailand working in refugee camps. We got to know the refugees who were escaping from Vietnam and Cambodia in the mid-1980's and often speculated what the lives of their children, who were growing up in refugee camps, would be like once they arrived in the U.S. What would they think of the harsh, ugly concrete and the stark, cold nature of American urban life after the lush, green beauty of Asia and the lively, carnival feeling of Asian cities? How would they reconcile their two cultural identities, especially since many aspects of American culture are so diametrically opposed to Asian culture? How would they feel about the physical and emotional distance and independence that characterize American social relationships after the close, mutually dependent nature of Asian society? How would they fare in the American school system which demands active participation rather than a passive respect for the authority of the teacher? And how would they reconcile the Asian value of respect for parents with the American tradition of teenage rebellion?

These questions that we asked ourselves in Asia translated themselves into new questions when we returned to the United States. Now our questions ask not only how this first generation of refugee children who have grown up in

the U.S. and have gone through our school system have adapted to us, but how we have changed to adapt to them. What have we learned from their experience? Have we gotten to know them? Do we know anything about their culture? Have we asked ourselves what these new students need and what they have to offer?

In her article, entitled "Listen to a New Word: Publishing from the Grassroots" Rachel Martin begins with a quotation from David Morley and Ken Warpole's book, The Republic of Letters, "The questions of who is to speak, who is to be listened to, and what kinds of voices and ways of writing are to be valued are always questions of political power."1 According to Rachel Martin, we can learn a great deal from listening to the disenfranchised whose voices are not usually heard. We feel this is also true of this new population of students in our schools. Perhaps we need to listen to them more, to value their strengths in order to discover what we can learn from them rather than merely expecting them to adapt to us.

In order to learn more about what these new students need and what they have to offer, we decided to conduct an exploratory field study of six Vietnamese American students (four boys and two girls) in a particular ESL class in their first year of college at Drexel University. We wanted to find out what these students' experiences in a college classroom were like. Were their strengths discovered and built upon? Did they bring a knowledge of themselves and

their cultural background to the class as a point of departure for sharing and developing their thinking and understanding of the world? If we view reading and writing as ways of developing an individual's sense of self and an ability to communicate with the world (as many educators such as Freire, Auerbach, Fingeret, Wallace, etc. do) rather than as a hierarchical set of skills to be mastered, then we need to see how classrooms where reading and writing are taught, invite students to become personally involved with texts, both as readers and as writers. As Vivian Zamel writes in her article, "Recent Research on Writing Pedagogy", "Holzman (1986) argues that without taking into account who our students are and what their lives are like, we cannot hope to bring about the kinds of changes in the classroom that are necessary in order for our students to become literate, a point that Freire's (1985) literacy campaigns have borne out. Holzman who reminds us of Labov's study of inner-city students whose performance in school was linked to their status in the community, stresses the importance of recognizing that influences beyond the classroom affect schooling and literacy."2 We need to know our students as whole people in order to be able to discover the strengths that allow them to become engaged with texts both as reader and as writers and the blocks, either personal or cultural, that prevent such an engagement.

We began our investigation with the following questions:

1. What are the learners' interests?

2. What are the learners' needs (both felt and unfelt)?

3. What are the learners' goals and motivations?

4. What are the learners' attitudes toward the classes - do they think they are helpful? Do they meet their expectations?

5. What are the learners' literacy practices and beliefs, both in their L1 and in English?

6. What are the learners' attitudes toward American and Vietnamese systems of education?

7. What are the learners' attitudes toward Vietnamese culture?

8. Is culture dealt with as an issue in the class? Is it seen as a point of reference for sharing or is it ignored?

9. What is the teacher's attitude toward the curriculum and materials?

10. Are the teacher's perceptions and students' perceptions of class events similar?

11. What is the effect of the Vietnamese extended family and community on students' attitudes toward learning?

12. What in the students' backgrounds has caused them to be "successful"? What are their strengths?

In order to answer these questions we decided to do the following:

1. Observe a number of classes over a period of one month.

2. Interview each of the six students involved in the study. (Questionnaire attached)

3. Interview the teacher of the course.

4. Interview the director of ESL programs at Drexel.

A Description of the Freshman English Program at Drexel

Recently Drexel University changed from a technical institute to a university. With this change came the necessity of adding freshman English courses to their curriculum to conform to the liberal arts tradition of American universities. In the Fall semester all students are required to take a composition course, in the Winter semester a literature course and in the Spring semester, a course in writing the research paper. It could be argued that this type of curriculum conforms to the specifications of "academic rationalism" as described by Eisner and Vallance, in which Western cultural traditions are perpetuated by teaching the academic disciplines through which students are exposed to the great ideas and culture that man has created. When asked why ESL students at a science and technical university need to study literature, the director of ESL programs at Drexel stated that there are English teachers at Drexel who want to teach literature. In other words, it is not necessarily that the students want or need to study literature but rather that the teachers want to teach it.

At the beginning of the year, all students are given a writing test. On the basis of this writing sample they are placed in one of three levels of a required English course. Most native speakers of English are placed in the highest level while most non-native English speakers are placed in the lowest level, although theoretically if a non-native

speaker of English did well on the placement test, he/she would be placed in the middle or high level class, while a native speaker who did poorly on the placement test could be put in the middle or low level class. Theoretically this is possible; however, one department, ESL, handles non-native speakers while another, the Department of Humanities and Communications, handles the native speakers. It is unclear how much cooperation and communication there is between these two sections of the university. In the low level class we observed, all of the students were non-native speakers of English, even though some of them had been in this country since they were small children and despite the fact that some of them had very good reading and writing skills. All English classes for matriculated students at Drexel are credit bearing courses, even the low level, "remedial" classes for ESL students. This is a unique feature of Drexel University since at most universities, "remedial" ESL programs offer non-credit courses only.

A Description of the Fall Semester Composition Course

The only difference between the Fall semester composition course for native speakers and the one for non-native speakers is the number of class meetings per week and the number of required essays. The course for native speakers meets only three times per week and requires the students to write six essays, whereas the course for non-native speakers meets every day and requires only four

essays. Both courses use the same materials, a book of readings along with a writing text and two grammar handbooks. However, the non-native speakers do not buy the whole book of readings but are required to purchase a bulk pack which contains a selection of readings from the original text.

The course for non-native speakers was adapted from the course for native speakers and is described as follows: This course syllabus is adapted from the R101 "Core Syllabus" authored by Crystal Bartolevich, Department of Humanities and Communications. R101 is an introduction to thinking, reading and writing at the college level. The course attempts to produce critical writers who are able to question not only the ideas of others, but also their own. In addition, students are encouraged to experience learning as a collaborative enterprise through class discussions, small group projects, and writing workshops." Although the course description includes reading and thinking, and the students are required to read four essays, "Ways of Seeing" by Berger, "The Achievement of Desire" by Rodriguez, "The Banking Concept of Education" by Freire and "Getting Dirty" by Miller, the teacher of the class we observed said that he viewed the course as focusing mainly on composition. After reading each essay the students are required to write their own essays using the reading as a starting point for their writing. Additional course requirements include: regular attendance, participation in writing workshops (in class)

and conference groups (in class), weekly Writing Center assignments requiring the assistance of Writing Center tutors (outside of class) and journals (homework). Points which determine a student's grade are assigned to each requirement including points for class participation. The course syllabus maps out a schedule of readings and essays for each week of the course.

A Description of Classes Observed

We observed four class meetings of the low level composition course for non-native speakers of English over a period of about one month. The class consisted of 22 students from various countries such as Hong Kong, Vietnam, the Soviet Union, Taiwan, Mexico and Puerto Rico. Students always sat in rows with the teacher sitting behind a desk at the front of the room except when students moved their chairs to work in groups, at which point the teacher circulated to help individual students.

We observed a complete "cycle" of classes, starting from the point when the teacher first assigned the students to read an essay and continuing through writing and editing their own papers. Students were assigned an essay to read at home. Essays were never read in class nor were any pre-reading or while-reading activities done in class. The day after a reading was assigned, the teacher led a discussion of the reading with the students sitting in rows and the teacher sitting behind his desk. Most of the discussion

consisted of the teacher trying to explain the text to the students and occasionally asking a question. Four or five students seemed interested in answering the teacher's questions while the rest of the class remained silent. The four Vietnamese boys, Thanh, Hung, Van and Son always sat in the front row and were among the most vocal students in the class while the two Vietnamese girls, Oanh and Thao sat in the back row and did not participate in any of the discussions we observed.

The essay we observed being discussed, "Getting Dirty" by Mark Crispin Miller, was a very difficult political and social analysis of a television advertisement. Except for the four or five students who responded to the teacher's questions, it was not clear either if the rest of the students had actually read the essay or if they had understood it. At no time were any post-reading activities done to help students express and develop their ideas about the essay or to give students an opportunity to ask questions about things they did not understand. In the whole class discussion, the teacher asked questions to which he appeared to be looking for one "right" answer. He often responded to students' comments with, "Well, yes but. . ." and then proceeded to give his own interpretation. At no time were the students' interpretations valued and we wondered why they participated at all unless perhaps it was for extra points toward their final grades. At one point

during the discussion the teacher did remind them that they could earn a few extra points by participating in class.

After the discussion, the teacher told the students that they were going to write essays similar to Miller's. The assignment was to find an advertisement, either in a magazine or on television, and analyze it the way Miller had done. The teacher then handed out an essay written by a student from a previous year analyzing a magazine ad. The students took turns reading the essay aloud and the teacher pointed out organizational and content features of the essay as they read. After talking about the essay the teacher asked if there were any questions and several of the students said that they still did not understand the assignment and expressed a concern that the assignment was too difficult. The teacher then asked them to find an ad in a magazine and bring it to class the next day.

On the following day, students broke up into loosely formed groups (some groups consisted of only two students while another group had eight students and one student worked all alone) to discuss the ads they had brought in. There were no guidelines for these discussions nor were there any guidelines about the types of ads that might lend themselves to interesting analyses. Each group had a number of ads and students ended up talking in pairs rather than focusing their attention on one ad and analyzing it as a group. Some students already had the rough drafts of their papers and were working on these. At the end of class the

teacher asked students to bring the rough drafts of their papers to class the next day as well as the editing sheet he had given them so that they could begin editing their rough drafts in class on the following day.

We had already seen an editing day on a previous occasion and were interested to discover that at no time were students given an opportunity to discuss the ideas in their papers or to revise those ideas but instead were asked to jump right into editing their first drafts. Editing day was again conducted in loose groups and students again ended up working in pairs since there were no guidelines as to how to discuss their papers in groups. Students used an editing worksheet, which listed grammar mistakes with examples, to go over each other's papers to find these mistakes.

We had the opportunity to read the papers that the six Vietnamese students had written in response to the Paolo Freire article "The Banking Concept of Education". They had been asked to discuss an experience in school in light of Freire's description of the "banking" concept of education (the teacher "depositing" knowledge into the students' heads) or as problem-solving (students learning how to learn and how to figure things out themselves). Except for Van, whose ideas were clear and well developed, the other Vietnamese students either had not understood the Freire article or had trouble applying his concepts to their own experiences in school. The ideas expressed in their papers were confusing, undeveloped and sometimes contradictory.

It is understandable that they would have trouble applying Freire's ideas to their own experiences, since all of them, except Van, chose their high school math classes to analyze and were confused by the term "problem-solving", using it to mean mathematical problem-solving. Many of them began their papers by saying that they didn't like the banking concept of education because they didn't like the teacher lecturing in front of the class while they had to take notes. They wanted to know the theories behind mathematical formulas but they felt they were too difficult to understand so they concluded their papers by saying that the banking concept of education was the best way to teach math.

If the students had been given a chance to discuss the ideas, both in the Freire article and in their own essays, perhaps they would have been able to develop their ideas about education and the roles of teachers and students further to come up with another way that math could be taught. This kind of analysis is very difficult, however, and would challenge even someone experienced in the field of education, let alone a freshman student interested in science and technology, particularly since their essays were limited to 500 words.

At no time did students receive oral feedback on their ideas, either from the teacher or from other students. The teacher gave back their papers, with grammar corrections in

red, a grade and a comment on their ideas and organization, comments which they may or may not have understood.

Students' Perceptions of Reading and Writing

Aside from required reading for school, most of the students say their outside reading consists of magazines: Newsweek, U.S. News, and computer magazines (several are majoring in Computer Science.) Thanh mentioned that he enjoyed reading books about adventure in high school, but he doesn't have time anymore. At one time, he collected comic books. He also said that he loved reading The Iliad because of all the adventures, and he likes some books by Isaac Asimov. In Thao's high school, students were encouraged and helped to choose books that they enjoyed, and were given time in class once a week for reading. Consequently, she continues to read romance novels occasionally. Hung said that he read all the time in Middle School, about one book a week. In particular, he mentioned Tolkien's Hobbit series. He was exposed to the first book in school, and liked it so much that he read the others in the series on his own.

Students also talked about specific strategies they use to help them understand when they read: guessing words, getting meaning from context, looking up words, asking someone the meanings of words, reading an assignment 4 or 5 times, writing definitions in the margins. According to these students, a good reader is someone who can read fast and is able to quickly get a deep understanding of the

material. Most of these students felt they were not good readers because they didn't read fast and their vocabulary was limited. Hung defines a good reader as "someone who understands what he reads and gives his own opinion about it. There's one meaning and a good reader gets it." Thanh says that a good reader understands the hidden meaning, not just one meaning. He deeply understands, not just the surface." Son says, "A good reader understands it, he can expand it, get an in-depth view of it. When I can do that, I'll be a good reader." The view of a good reader that emerges from these comments is someone who possesses highly developed specialized skills and can use them to find the correct meaning that exists in a text.

All of the students except for Son perceive themselves as poor writers: "I need help with organization, topic, how to write an outline." "I hate writing papers. Writing is one of my weaknesses. The teacher writes "awkward" on my introductions. I don't know why. Maybe it sounds funny." Van says that he feels confident about expressing his ideas, but he has trouble with organization, being direct with ideas, using strong words rather than going around in circles. Son states that "either you know how to write or you don't. I learned how to write at Community College during the Summer. I learned that a good writer organizes the writing real nice so that other people can read it. Before I thought writing was just writing things down for other people to read. Here (at Drexel) it's just an exercise

for a grade. This course doesn't teach the skills for writing.

Similar to reading, writing is viewed as a set of skills to be mastered. Once a student masters all the difficult steps involved, then he knows how to write. The expression of ideas is secondary to how the writing "looks" on the page. There is a correct way to write, and if one doesn't know the right way, then one is not a good writer.

Students' Perceptions of the Course

All students said that they do little if any writing outside of school. In their English class at Drexel, they write their papers because they have to. They do the work for a grade: "We have to write four 500-word essays for a total of 100 points each. The teacher takes off points for word choice, organization, grammar and sentence structure. We're supposed to write 3 drafts, but the teacher wants only the final draft." It's not surprising that these students perceive their writing assignments in this class as an "exercise" with no real purpose except for a grade. The only audience is the teacher, who makes vague comments on students' ideas, but takes off points for organization, grammar and sentence structure. Although the class is an ESL class, it is also considered an English class for credit. Students are assumed to have the awareness and the metacognitive skills for analyzing their rough drafts, interpreting the teacher's written comments and improving

their writing according to the guidelines imposed by the English department. As one student said, "This is supposed to be an ESL class so it should help us work on basic skills. But it's the same as the regular English class except there's less reading and writing."

This appears to be a basic conflict between the stated purpose of the course (to teach students how to think, read and write analytically), and how students are evaluated: on their ability to manipulate the language according to approved academic guidelines. The students know that in order for them to get a good grade in the course, they need to learn how to write grammatically correct English. The students' comments express their confusion: "The teacher doesn't help with the structure and organization of formal academic writing." "The class doesn't teach us how to write an essay." Thanh says that the class helps him to become more aware of his weaknesses. The teacher helps him identify where his mistakes are: "He wrote "awkward" on my introduction. But I don't know why. Maybe it sounds funny." Thanh doesn't know why his writing is awkward, so he concludes, "writing is difficult."

Hung says that he doesn't put as much effort into this English class as he did in classes in high school. "I know it's not my major. I don't think what I'm doing in this English class will help me with my other courses." There is general agreement among all the students interviewed that the reading and writing they do in the English course has

little if any relevance to their other courses. They accept the fact that it's just something to get through.

The students say that the small groups help a little but there's no direction from the teacher. Thanh doesn't think there's a lot of communication in the class, but his friend Son helps him a lot. "He helps me read and shares his ideas with me." Hung says that there is too much freedom in the class. "I'm used to having my older brother and sister to tell me what to do. Now, I'm not motivated." Van says that there's too much freedom in the class so students don't know how to do what they're supposed to do. His American roommate helps him with his English papers. In return, he helps him with Computer Science.

This kind of collaborative effort between students takes place outside of class but is not promoted in class. Although students work in loosely formed groups in class, there are no guidelines for the task they are to do together, so the group process breaks down and students end up working individually or in pairs to edit each other's papers. At no time did we observe students working collaboratively on ideas. They did not discuss, question or challenge each other's ideas and in fact ideas were subordinate to surface structure even though, as we saw from their papers, it was the ideas in their writing that needed to be worked on, much more than the grammar mistakes.

The Teacher's Perceptions of the Course

The teacher of the course feels a lot of pressure from the Humanity's Department to "bring up the standards" of the students. One problem is that these "standards" are not written out. The criteria used for grading students' essays are determined by the teacher, but the Dean has said explicitly that he wants the ESL students "to be graded hard." Because these students are receiving credit for the course, the ESL papers are supposed to be graded on a par with the papers written in the native speakers' class. In accordance with these administrative policies, the Dean has explicitly told teachers that ESL students' grades are not to be inflated: "We need some D's and F's".

All of this decision-making without regard for the needs of the students places the teacher in a difficult dilemma. "What should I do with the person who tries hard? Some of these students work extremely hard, but I know that they won't get up to a certain level. How can I fail students like that? I really see a problem here if I'm supposed to fail a certain percentage of the class. It's hard on me, and it's certainly unfair to the students. How much can they improve in 10 weeks?"

The teacher feels that teaching reading is not one of the purposes of the course. He leaves them to do the reading on their own at home because of time constraints. The purpose of the readings is to stimulate writing. According to the teacher, students begin their writing by working on

ideas, thesis statements and organization. Eventually, they work on grammar and sentence structure. The teacher agrees with students that they have severe grammar problems. "If the grammar problems are so severe that they interfere with the ideas, I give a low grade, but I'll write on the paper: You've got some good ideas, but they're lost in the grammar problems."

Grammar is not dealt with much in class, again because of time constraints. Students do have grammar workbooks, but they are rarely used for the same reason. The teacher hopes that students will deal with some of their problems in small groups when they are working on their drafts. He tells students to focus on a limited number of problems: "Work on this area (i.e. tenses) and try and understand why." He hopes that this will help them a little, but realizes that "there won't be any miracles in 10 weeks."

When asked if he taught according to a certain philosophy about the nature of learning and teaching, the teacher said that he believes in a "collaborative approach". Students need to recognize that they are all resources. He does not want students to view the teacher as the only authority in the classroom. Accordingly, he does not give a great deal of direction. He expects the students to take more responsibility for their own learning and progress. The majority of discussion takes place in small groups. According to the teacher, these groups were formed according to where students happened to be sitting on the first day of

the semester. Therefore, the groups tend to form themselves ethnically and by sex. Among the Vietnamese students, one group is composed of all men. The other group is all women, except for one Vietnamese man. The teacher observes that "the Asian women are less talkative. It's hard to get them to participate. They always sit together. They are also weaker in writing." Overall, he thinks that students are motivated in the class, although he's not sure about some of the Asian women."They seemed overwhelmed."

Student's backgrounds

In order to gain a greater understanding of the target population for our study, a comprehensive interview was conducted with each of the six Vietnamese students in the class: Son, Van, Thanh, Hung (boys) and Oanh and Thao (girls). Except for Hung, who arrived in this country in 1975 when he was 4 years old, and Thao, who arrived in 1985 when she was 14, the other students all arrived around 1980, when they were approximately 9 years old. All of the students interviewed are now 19 years of age.

All of these students and their families came from South Vietnam and escaped by boat to various refugee camps in Malaysia, Hong Kong, Indonesia, and the Philippines, where the average length of stay was one year. Several students mentioned that they began to learn basic survival English at this time. Van, the only ethnic Chinese in the group, appeared to have vivid memories of his family's escape and

subsequent stay in Malaysia. His boat was attacked and robbed by pirates on 3 different occasions. In Malaysia, his father discovered that he had cancer, from which he died shortly after the family arrived in the U.S. These incidents had a profound effect on Van and his siblings. He mentioned several times that their father sacrificed everything to get the family out of Vietnam. They feel the strongest obligation to do everything they can to make the most of the existing opportunities here and "show father it was all worth it." The other students have very hazy memories of this period of their lives, except for Thao, who said that her experience in Bataan Camp in the Philippines was "awesome." As an adolescent, she was enrolled in a specially developed program geared to preparing Southeast Asian teenagers to enter high school in the U.S. This was a very positive experience for her.

Except for Thao, all of the students went through middle schools and high schools in this country. After 2 years of ESL classes, they were mainstreamed into regular classes. Son mentioned that he found mainstreaming much more useful for learning English because he was finally able to interact with American students and learn how they talk. Thanh mentioned that for the first few years after he arrived, his family lived in an area with "all Vietnamese, and that's why my English still isn't very good. That kept me back: If I had been together with Americans, my English would be better." With the exception of Thanh and Thao, all of the

students have no trace of a Vietnamese accent. Thao attended a specially formed ESL class for her and her siblings and was gradually mainstreamed into regular classes over a 2-year period, until her senior year when all of her classes were taken with American students. Thao was in ninth grade when she left Vietnam and mentioned that the switch from the rote learning approach to which she was accustomed, to the American system that stresses individual exploration and expression proved to be very difficult for her. In Vietnam, when a teacher addresses the class, the students are expected to sit quietly, take notes, and never challenge or contradict the teacher. In America she is expected to ask questions and offer her own opinions.

Van's comments on his high school experience reflect positive memories. He spoke of a high school teacher who was his mentor. He was a friend. They did things outside of class together: "He was less formal in that he treated me as a friend rather than a student." When Van goes home, he always goes to visit his high school because he feels very welcome there. He mentioned that he worked in the school during his last Summer before coming to college, and it was very difficult to leave. He also worked as an editor on his high school yearbook. The teacher of the yearbook course set up a structure within which students collaborated to make all their own decisions. The strong feelings apparent in Van's voice as he discussed this experience made it clear how important this time was in his life. Van wrote in one of

his essays stimulated by Paulo Freire's "The Banking Concept of Education", "I was excited about the challenges that I would have to face because unlike my other classes, Yearbook was a lot different. The concept of giving homework and examinations did not exist. The class objective was to produce a high quality yearbook while each student's goal was to use his creativity and imagination so that the finished product would reflect his own identity and individualism. I took the class because I wanted to do something productive for a change. Since I was the editor, most of the pages in the yearbook reflected my personality and the kind of person that I am."

Van went to a small high school where he received a great deal of individual attention. The other students were less specific about their high school experience except those already noted by Thao in comparing school here to Vietnam, and Son, who was president of this high school class. Other students mentioned having opportunities to take advanced science and math courses that other, less successful students in school were not eligible for.

There was a general concensus among all of the students that they had many different kinds of friends in High School, and in fact resisted staying with only other Vietnamese. As Son said, "I don't just hang in one group. I'm all over the place. I don't want to be isolated in one group."

In general, most of these students appear to be fairly Americanized, and all of them mentioned that this has caused conflicts with their families. Parental authority with strict discipline is part of the Southeast Asian culture. This has led to frequent challenges to that authority by these adolescents. Several of them mentioned that they felt half Vietnamese and half American. On the one hand, their home culture expects them to be quiet, obedient, hardworking, humble, and respectful. Whereas at school and with their peers, they learn the American adolescent values which have a strong emphasis on independence, self-reliance, "going out", and dating. All of these students spoke of feeling resentment at times towards their parents, who expected them to excel in school and stay at home to study. Socializing, partying, dating are looked upon as unacceptable behaviors. Education and studying and "good grades" are the priorities. Thanh mentioned that his parents strongly discouraged him from attending his senior prom because they felt he could do things like that later after he "grew up". Son said that he never brings girlfriends home because his parents disapprove. The girls said that they are closely guarded by their parents, and it was a major decision to allow them to live away from home in the dorm. Traditionally, Vietnamese girls and boys are very separated. Thao says her parents think "if you talk to a guy, you like him, with implications. They don't understand how it is

here. They say, now, just study, no boy friends. I say, if I wait until I graduate, I will be too old. They say no."

All of the students said that they spoke their native language only at home with their parents. Those who have been here for ten years or longer say that they are more proficient in English and they use it even with their Vietnamese friends. Thao said that when she speaks Vietnamese with her Vietnamese friends who have been here for some time, they have trouble understanding her, and their spoken language is awkward. Van said, "I hate it when people speak their own language on the street. We're in America so we should speak English, but at home, speak whatever language you want."

Only two of the students interviewed were proficient in native language literacy. Thao, as the most recent arrival, grew up using reading and writing in Vietnamese for multiple purposes. She enjoys reading Vietnamese romance novels, and continues to order them from the library here in the U.S. Son's mother is still in Vietnam, and reading letters from and writing to her is an important activity in his family. The other students have minimal or no skills, but all of them mentioned that they want to learn, although their purposes are vague. Van wants to learn to write Chinese because there is a tradition of writing in his family. In Vietnam, the teaching of Chinese was banned, and the area in Pennsylvania where his family settled had few Chinese and no Chinese schools. Now at Drexel, he is enrolled in a Chinese

class. Hung says, "I feel like half of me is American (with my friends), but with my family I feel Vietnamese. Richard Rodriguez lost his family and I can see the same thing happening to me. I want to step back from it." Now he has a Vietnamese girlfriend, more recently arrived, who is teaching him to read in Vietnamese. He's also interested in taking a Vietnamese class offered at Drexel which focuses on the reading and discussion of Vietnamese songs and poetry.

The other students mentioned that since coming to Drexel, they have felt a renewed interest in maintaining their ethnic culture. Whereas in high school, they made an effort not to" hang around" with a Vietnamese group, now they do so because it feels more comfortable. Everyone mentioned a strong motivation to maintain their own culture together with American culture. Students' statements concerning their motivation to preserve their native language and culture may have been influenced by their recent exposure to the writings of Richard Rodriguez. This article appeared to have a powerful impact on all of these students. Every single student mentioned how he/she identified with Rodriguez's story. Throughout high school, they had distanced themselves from their own culture, and now, as Son put it, they wanted to "get back to their roots before it was too late."

All of the students interviewed mentioned that they would like to visit Vietnam someday, "when it's safe". Thanh went so far as to say that he wants to go back there to

live. Thao's goal now is to study pharmacology and public health, and then work either in the camps or in Vietnam to help her people. Although none of the parents of these students have been exposed to higher education, all have native literacy, and read Vietnamese newspapers published in the U.S. Several students mentioned that they would like to read these newspapers also so as to follow events in both Vietnam and within the greater Vietnamese community in this country.

Home and cultural group values and traditions play an important role in these students going to college. Their refugee parents, with more limited skills in English, place a very high value on their children becoming competent readers and writers of English. All of these students mentioned that they have helped their parents on various occasions by reading and interpreting English documents, by filling out a wide variety of forms and slips, and by writing notes and letters for them in English.

During the interviews, parents' priority placed on education, studying and going to college to get a degree emerged as the way to a better, more comfortable life. This constant pressure from parents seems to have propelled most of these students into college. Oanh says, "my parents told me, you must go to college. They felt bad because they weren't able to go to college." Van says, "We're trying to get there. We know what's good for us." Son mentioned that his father wanted him to go to college. He had wanted to

work to help his father, but his father told him to get his degree because then he could do whatever he wanted: "concentrate on school. Don't mess around." Grades, school, doing well are the priority. Thanh says that his parents "forced" him to go to college: "As long as you live under my roof, you do as I say." Thao says that her parents worked hard to save money just for her to go to college. She feels an obligation to her parents to do the best she can in her work and not let them down.

The following is a summary of issues that arose from interviewing these students:

1. Formal education is viewed as an avenue to middle-class occupational status. These students and their parents appear to believe that if they work hard enough, they can succeed in school, regardless of all the obstacles.
2. The parents of these students reject the goal of total assimilation and, to guard against assimilationist pressures, they may even admonish their offspring to varying extents to avoid socializing outside of school with student peers. At the same time, however, they urge their children to adopt what they perceive as good for the majority culture: to abide by school rules, and to learn what they can from their teachers. The learning of English and the acquisition of other academic skills are actively promoted as avenues to socioeconomic success.

3. These students are conscious of intergenerational conflicts due to different rates of acculturation resulting in strained relations within the family. They are under a strong double-bind. On the one hand, their home culture expects them to be quiet, obedient, hardworking, and respectful, whereas at school and with their peers, they learn the American values of independence, self-reliance, and competition.

4. As these students grew up in America and strove to become acculturated and "fit in" with their peers in school, there seems to have been a conscious or unconscious rejection of their own culture and language to some extent. Although the extended family is of utmost importance, they did not grow up as part of a larger community of Vietnamese. Students mentioned that they did not want to be labeled as only "hanging around" with other Vietnamese. They had a variety of friends and they did not like to use their Vietnamese language outside the home.

5. As these students have left the relative security of their home environments (many for the first time), to enter the larger world of the university, with all of its challenges and lack of imposed structures, they feel the need to bond together with other Vietnamese students. Most reported that only now do they want to stay with other Vietnamese. They feel more identification with their culture. Distance from the home culture gives them a new perspective and understanding of their parents' orientation.

They want to maintain their culture and language, and add on what they perceive as positive aspects from "American culture".

6. All of these students, including those who entered American mainstream classes by age 10, continue to encounter problems of varying degrees with reading and writing in English. Aside from the reading of various types of magazines outside of class, reading and writing are perceived as important mainly to be successful in school. Most of these students recognize that they lack the cognitive abilities and cultural awareness in the language to critically analyze their own reading and writing processes, and learn how to improve them up to the expected academic standards.

7. In comparison to American mainstream norms, these students come from home cultures that are based on a strict hierarchy of authority. Parents and older siblings traditionally tell younger siblings what to do and when to do it. There are clear expectations of every person in the extended family.

This need for a strong structure to guide one's actions also carries over into other areas of life, such as school. Van mentioned the sense of freedom he felt in high school in his Yearbook class. Students made all the decisions, but these choices were made within the structure imposed by his mentor. Van had a special relationship of trust with this teacher. Within this atmosphere of mutual respect and

sincere interest, Van was led to learn his editing tasks, and become increasingly independent.

However, the anonymity of a large university, which expects initiative and decision-making to come from the individual students themselves, may be overwhelming to those used to a greater degree of imposed structure and direction. This lack of structure and direction is especially frustrating in a class where students don't know how to do what they're expected to do.

Conclusion and recommendations

In his article, "Multicultural Classrooms, Monocultural Teachers", Terry Dean discusses the problems experienced by this new and increasing population of students from a wide variety of cultures in our universities . According to Dean, the anxiety that students feel when they realize that their cultural backgrounds are in direct conflict with the accepted cultural norms of American society will undoubtedly affect their ability to learn and do well in an academic environment. Although some would argue that these students are already a "success" since they made it to college, Dean points out that the dropout rate of these students is significant.

> But retention rates indicate that not all students are making the transition into academic culture equally well. While the causes of dropout are admittedly complex, cultural dissonance seems at the very least to play an important role. . .

> Several anthropological and social science studies show how cultural dissonance can affect learning. Shirley Brice Heath examines the ways in which the natural language environment of working-class Black and white children can interfere with their success in schools designed primarily for children from middle-class mainstream culture. The further a child's culture is from the culture of the school, the less chance for success. Classroom environments that do not value the home culture of the students lead to decreased motivation and poor academic performance.3

As noted in the previous section of the paper, all of the students involved in our study, experienced some kind of cultural dissonance. Many of them experienced conflicts in high school because of the different expectations and values of their parents and peers concerning dating and other social activities. In college, however, these conflicts appear to have changed somewhat. Away from the security and comfort of the family structure, the students we interviewed actually seemed to be more interested in developing and maintaining their own culture, perhaps as a way of maintaining their identities in the midst of a large, alienating and overwhelming urban university. Many of the students mentioned having more Vietnamese friends as well as a new interest in learning to read Vietnamese and Chinese. Terry Dean quotes a Vietnamese student's feeling about what it's like to be Vietnamese in America.

> Vietnamese students feel inferior to Americans because Americans do not understnad why we are here. We are refugees, not illegal immigrants. There are a lot of unspoken differences between Vietnamese and Americans

> because the memory of the Vietnam war is so fresh, and it is difficult for Americans to be comfortable with us because we are the conflict. Vietnamese students also suffer an identity crisis because the Vietnamese community has not established itself yet in America as other Asian groups have.4

Not only, then, are students from diverse cultural backgrounds, like mainstream American students, learning to cope in a different academic environment with all of its new social and academic expectations but they are also grappling with a new identity and relationship to their families and cultural backgrounds when they enter the university. According to Terry Dean, it is in part up to their "English" teachers to help these students make this transition successfully.

> When we teach composition, we are teaching culture. Depending on students' backgrounds, we are teaching at least academic culture, what is acceptable evidence, what persuasive strategies work best, what is taken to be a demonstration of "truth" in different disciplines. For students whose home culture is distant from mainstream culture, we are also teaching how, as a people, "mainstream" Americans view the world. Consciously or unconsciously we do this and the responsibility is frightening.5

According to Dean we can help students become successful in academic environments, not only by transmitting knowledge of the dominant culture, but also by valuing students' own cultural backgrounds. As evidence, Dean sites James Cummins' article, "Empowering Minority Students: A Framework for Intervention."

> Students who have ambivalence about their cultural identity tend to do poorly whereas

> "widespread school failure does not occur in minority groups that are positively oriented towards both their own and the dominant culture, (that) do not perceive themselves as inferior to the dominant group, and (that) are not alienated from their own cultural values".(22) Cummins argues that vehement resistance to bilingual education comes in part because "the incorporation of minority languages and cultures into the school program confers status and power (jobs for example) on the minority group."(25) But for Cummins, it is precisely this valuing of culture within the school that leads to academic success because it reverses the role of domination of students by the school.6

As we have seen in our description of the freshman English program at Drexel, students' cultural diversity is not valued and is not seen as a resource to explore and share. This devaluation of students' cultures can be seen both at the level of program planning and in the classroom itself. At the program level, "ESL" students are segregated from students whose cultural background is more consistent with mainstream American values, even though many of these so-called "ESL" students have been in this country since they were small children and have developed language skills that rival native-speaker competence. According to Terry Dean, students' cultural diversity can benefit both mainstream American students as well as recent immigrants by introducing both groups to new cultures and ways of viewing the world.

It would be interesting to challenge Drexel University's unstated policy of keeping these two groups separate to determine the assumptions behind such a policy. It would

appear to be based more on cultural elitism than on sound pedagogical reasoning. For, although the students are given a placement test, that test is designed to evaluate the extent to which students have learned the "jargon" of academic discourse and will naturally give an advantage to students whose cultures most closely "match" the mainstream culture. In addition, teachers grading "ESL" students' papers may already be predetermined to give these students lower marks than they would native-speakers' papers. And finally, since the two departments that deal with ESL students and native-speakers are separate, the administrative structure of the university is actually keeping these students segregated. The assumption is that the native-speakers are more advanced and that the "ESL" students need to catch-up both linguistically and culturally.

The ESL department does not even have the power and authority in the university to determine its own curriculum. The curriculum for freshman English courses is determined by the Department of Humanities and Communications and the course for "ESL" students is merely an adaptation of the curriculum for native-speakers. It is not clear why these two departments are separate if they are using essentially the same curriculum. Since the course for "ESL" students is a reduced form of the one for native-speakers, presumably the university must feel that "ESL" students have the same ability as native-speakers, the only difference being that

they are slower, they can't read as fast or write as many papers. This leads the "ESL" students to conclude that good readers are students who can read quickly and good writers can produce more pages without having to worry about grammar mistakes.

These messages, that other cultures are somehow less "developed" and the assumption that reading and writing are skills in which "ESL" students are deficient, are explicit in the classroom as well as in the organization of the freshman English program itself. Our assumption is that in class students require a structured format within which ample opportunities are provided for them to explore, clarify, and develop their ideas rooted in their own cultural orientation. If students are expected to construct meaning from what they read, connecting their prior knowledge to the new ideas that they encounter, and apply this meaning in their writing, then culture is a necessary component of the course. The ESL course as it exists, does not allow for this kind of cultural exploration.

One might argue that on a surface level there appears to be a strong match between Southeast Asian culture-based attitudes, values, and beliefs regarding the role of education, and those of the dominant white culture in America. Both cultures view education as the means to socioeconomic mobility. They share many of the same values: discipline, reverence of family, and a deep respect for education. Such a match would seem to account for the recent

highly publicized reports of Southeast Asian students' dramatic success in American schools. These "success stories" are also pointed to as evidence that culturally differing students whose first language is not English can succeed in school without the assistance of multicultural programs and that cultural difference is not necessarily a barrier to school success. According to Terry Dean, those who favor such a view say that "Since we want our students to enter the mainstream, all we need worry about is providing them the tools. Like opponents of bilingual education, some would argue that we need to concern ourselves more with providing student access to academic culture, not spending time on student culture."7 This is the assumption on which the ESL program at Drexel is based.

However, as evidenced by our own experience with the high school dropout rate of Southeast Asian students in Boston, and through our discussions with the Vietnamese students at Drexel, cultural conflict between academic culture and students' home culture is a very real issue. As Terry Dean reports about his own university students, "Entering freshmen are often unaware of the erosion of their culture until they become seniors or even later."8

The students we interviewed all commented that they recognized themselves when reading about Richard Rodriguez's response to academic success. When we invited them to talk about their lives, all of them recognized issues of cultural conflict which affected their relationships both in and out

of the home. Their comments reveal symptoms of self identity crisis, as they are caught between the traditional cultural values and attitudes promoted at home, and the lure of the American way of life surrounding them at school. These students are confused, and it is the obligation of the ESL class to validate rather than ignore the cultural differences they bring with them. Without providing an appropriate structure within which students are able to gain access to the readings, learn to collaborate constructively with other students, and develop their ideas through discussion and writing, how can they be expected to develop analytical skills in reading and writing?

First of all, the ESL class does not provide a structure within which the students are able to transact with the text. By planning and incorporating specific activities before reading, students will be better prepared to link the text with their own experiences, attitudes, and ideas. For example, before having students read Miller's critical analysis described earlier in this paper, the teacher might ask students what products they buy in this country and in their own countries. What types of advertising appeal to them? Why? What assumptions do advertisers make about the various types of audiences they appeal to? Allow students to discuss real ads in small groups, to raise their own questions, and compare ideas based on their own backgrounds. Have students work together to design their own ads for a product geared for a particular population and explain why

they did it that way, and what assumptions they are making about the target population.

Miller's article assumes a great deal of American cultural knowledge. He also uses sexual imagery that might not be apparent to readers not familiar with it. The teacher could have provided a framework that would have allowed students to gain access to the ideas in the reading by giving them opportunities to discuss the issues from their own experiences prior to reading. What are the roles of women in their own cultures? Has this image changed in the last 20 years? How has moving into American society changed the way they see themselves and their roles in their families? Questions such as these provide a rich context within which students feel encouraged to openly discuss their own lives in relation to the ideas in the text. The teacher might ask the students to write about concepts, vocabulary, situations from the text. Students share what they've written with each other in small groups and then the whole class. In all of these ways, the teacher might help the students to activate their prior knowledge, thus laying the ground for the ideas they will encounter in the text.

During the reading of the text, students need specific strategies to help them read constructively. Rather than viewing meaning as existing only in the text which the reader must read "correctly" in order to understand, the teacher needs to plan activities that make the reading accessible, so that students can construct their own

responses and construct their own meaning: students relating what they are reading to their own experiences, taking notes, writing their own questions, reading sections of the article to each other, interacting with each other to discuss their own responses.

The organization of the ESL class presumes that culturally differing students whose first language is not English will become assimilated to the academic rationalist approach of the American University system by teaching them how to read, write, and think according to the standards imposed by this system. If this is the goal of the ESL class, then the teacher needs to become a facilitator, introducing a carefully structured sequence of activities that teach the students how to bridge the gap, both culturally and linguistically. When the teacher disregards a basic, orderly approach that recognizes the cultural diversity of the students, and dispenses with the steps that help them to connect and become engaged with the required text so that they can develop their own ideas in writing, then students are being done a great disservice. Such a class gives no validity to the rich store of knowledge and experience that students bring with them, and they end up by being told what is there instead of allowing them to discover what is meaningful for them.

From our field study, there are two recommendations we can make to improve the freshman English program at Drexel University (and probably at similar colleges and

universities across the country). One approach is more realistic and would involve working within the program as it now exists. Without changing the curriculum or the materials or the segregation of mainstream students and "ESL" students, we feel that the classroom experience of the "ESL" students could be greatly improved. The ESL department espouses "collaborative learning" but has not made sure, either that the teachers know what this means or that they have the tools necessary to implement this style of learning effectively. We feel that in-service, professional development for teachers is extremely important to help experienced teachers keep abreast of new ideas and developments in the field. Professional development activities that encourage teachers to share ideas also keeps teachers excited and interested in their work and this can only be beneficial for students.

A more idealistic approach to reforming university freshman English programs for students whose first language is not English, would involve an integration of these students with students who speak English as a native language. Since many of the students we studied have been in the United States since they were small children, it is difficult to understand why they should be segregated from native English speakers. Putting these two groups of students together in the same classes would also promote the sharing of different cultural perspectives and would value the increasingly diverse nature of the academic community.

After all, who are the new students in our universities? What we have traditionally called "minority" groups are rapidly becoming the majority in institutions of higher education. By keeping so-called "white middle-class" students separated from ethnic minorities, we are helping to exaggerate racial stereotypes that lead to hostility rather than promoting mutual understanding.

We began this paper with a plea for equal access to education for all cultural groups. But as we have seen, equal opportunity is not enough, we must also value the cultures to whom we are opening our doors. Terry Dean illustrates this point with a quotation from Bourdieu and Passeron:

> Those who believe that everyone would be given equal access to the highest level of education and the highest culture, once the same economic means were provided for all those who have the requisite "gifts," have stopped halfway in their analysis of the obstacles; they ignore the fact that the abilities measured by the scholastic criteria stem not so much from natural "gifts" (which must remain hypothetical so long as the educational inequalities can be traced to other causes), but from the greater or lesser affinity between class cultural habits and the demands of the educational system or the criteria which define success in it.9

In order to ensure real equality of opportunity, all cultures must be considered equally valuable. As we have seen, change must be brought about both in the classroom, with teachers becoming more aware of their students'

cultures and ways to exploit cultural diversity in the classroom, as well as in the structure of the university. Universities must learn how to integrate different cultures not just socially but academically as well. The old "academic rationalist" curriculum is out of date since our priority is no longer to transmit a body of cultural knowledge and ideas. The new university curriculum will have to be founded on self-actualization and social reconstruction to allow individuals to develop their own identities in the face of rapid social change. We are no longer concerned with individuals adapting to society. In our modern, multicultural society our educational institutions must help individuals learn to shape society to meet their own needs rather than teaching individuals how to adapt to the rules of the larger society.

This question of whether cultural or educational institutions should open up the academic curriculum to cultural diversity in order to empower women and minorities has become a national debate. The November 21, 1990 issue of "The Chronicle of Higher Education" contains an article about an emotionally charged battle going on between members of the English department at the University of Texas at Austin. Some of the professors in the department redesigned the freshman English course to "focus on a single theme of 'difference'. Students would study a collection of prominent court cases dealing with issues such as affirmative action and discrimination, and read related essays. They would, for

example, study the 1964 Civil Rights Act and complete a series of writing assignments analyzing the arguments made in the case."10 However, other members of the English department were vehemently opposed to the course. "They've turned the course upside down," says Mr. Gribben, the chief critic. "Where we used to have chapters devoted to grammar, we now have chapters devoted to oppression. If you really care about women and minorities making it in society, it doesn't make sense to divert their attention to oppression when they should be learning basic writing skills."11

Mr. Gribben's argument is essentially that women and minorities must adapt to the expectations of a society defined by the dominant culture. However, that culture is changing as minorities become the majority. In a democratic society, it is the responsibility of our educational institutions to teach all of our citizens the connection between power and the effective use of language.

The writer of the article in "The Chronicle of Higher Education" draws the following conclusion. "In some respects, the battle over English 306 is an explosive version of the discussions taking place on many campuses over whether certain courses should be content-neutral or content-based. It also reflects the contentious debates taking place nationwide over whether and how, curricula should be revised to promote awareness of cultural diversity."12 If courses are content-neutral, aren't we eradicating the true purpose and meaning of reading and

writing, which is to communicate important information and to promote change? Aren't we saying that reading and writing are just dull skills one needs to get a job? And aren't we reserving the true, vital meaning of reading and writing for an educated elite who secretly horde the rights to these powerful forms of communication? In a democratic society, the only way to teach reading and writing is through meaningful, content-based courses. Students must be able to connect what they read and write to important issues in their own lives, both in order to understand themselves and their cultural heritage and to use reading and writing powerfully to communicate with and to effect change in the larger society.

VIETNAMESE STUDENTS AT DREXEL UNIVERSITY - AN EXPLORATORY FIELD STUDY

OUTLINE

1. Introduction
2. A Description of the Freshman English Program at Drexel
3. A Description of the Fall Semester Composition Course
4. A Description of Classes Observed
5. Students' Perceptions of Reading and Writing
6. Students' Perceptions of the Course
7. The Teacher's Perceptions of the Course
8. Students' Backgrounds
9. Conclusion and Recommendations

A brief description of the class we observed:

This was a low-level course in reading and writing for freshman non-native speakers. The class consisted of 22 students from various countries, including Vietnam, Hong Kong, Taiwan, The Soviet Union, Mexico, and The Netherlands.

Some points about the classes we observed:

1. The teacher sat in front of the class behind a desk and students sat in rows facing him.

2. All class discussions consisted of the teacher asking questions or explaining a text and a few students responding, while the rest of the class remained silent.

3. The students did not know each other's names (outside of their own ethnic groups). Their lives and cultures were not seen as resources to discuss and share, even though the reading for the course lent themselves to discussions of culture.

4. When students worked in groups they tended to form ethnically and by sex.

5. There were no guidelines for group discussions or any group reports to the whole class.

6. There were no pre-reading or while-reading activities. Reading was done at home. The post-reading activity consisted of the teacher-led discussion described above.

7. The ideas in students' essays were never discussed. The first draft was edited in groups for grammar mistakes.

The Freshman English Program at Drexel:

1. Courses for native speakers are handled by the Department of Humanities and Communications while courses for non-native speakers are handled by the ESL department.

2. The native speakers and the non-native speakers are placed in separate classes even though many of the non-native speakers we talked to have been in the U.S. since they were small children and have language and literacy skills that rival native speakers.

3. The course for non-native speakers is exactly the same as the one for native speakers except that the non-native speakers have to read and write fewer essays.

Recommendations:

1. Whenever possible, non-native speakers should be integrated with native speakers.

2. If non-native speakers have special needs, a different course should be designed to meet those needs.

3. Teachers should be paid to attend professional development workshops which address: ways of setting up group activities to promote collaborative learning, using pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading activities, using cultural diversity as a resource, setting up a student-centered class, and responding to student writing.

Conclusion:

An "Academic Rationalist" curriculum has led teachers and students to assume dominant and passive roles respectively, imitating the roles they are accustomed to in other academic disciplines where the main classroom activity is the lecture. But teaching language and literacy is different from teaching an academic subject. It is important for students to make a personal connection to what they read and write about and this personal connection is difficult if students' cultural identity is different from that of the dominant culture.

When we teach language and literacy, we are teaching culture. It has been documented that students who feel that their culture is inferior to the dominant culture feel a dissonance between their home and school experiences and do not do well in school. Therefore, it is important for schools to value cultural diversity and the strengths that the students bring with them to the classroom and to use culture as something we can all learn from.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: DREXEL STUDENTS

Background

1. Where are you from originally?

2. When did you come to this country?

3. Where do you live?

4. Tell me about your family.

5. What are you interested in?

6. What do you do in your spare time?

7. What are you studying at Drexel?

8. What would you like to do when you graduate?

9. Do you speak Vietnamese? Do you and your family use Vietnamese with each other?

10. Can you read and write Vietnamese? When do you do this?

11. What do you like to read in English/ Vietnamese?

12. How much time do you spend reading?

13. Did you go to school in Vietnam? What do you remember about that?

14. Did your parents go to school in Vietnam?

15. Can they read Vn/ English?

16. Are you the first person to go to college in your family?

17. When you finished high school, did your parents encourage you to go to college?

18. Tell me about your experience in high school. What did you like/dislike about high school?

19. Do you help your parents with English?

20. Which courses do you like the best/ worst?

21. Which do you find the most difficult?

22. What do you think of American college life?

23. Who are your friends? Vn? Americans?

24. Do you feel any conflicts between Vn culture and American culture?

25. What language do you use with your family and friends?

26. Do you think that your culture will die out in America?

27. Do you feel a strong connection to Vn culture?

28. Do you live as an American or as a Vietnamese?

29. Are you happy living in America? What do you like/ dislike about it?

30. Do you ever think about going back and visiting Vietnam? Why or why not?

Writing

1. Do you think you're a good writer? Why or why not?

2. Can you write in Vietnamese? What do you like to write in English or Vietnamese?

3. What do you want to improve about your writing?

4. What would you like or need to use writing for?

5. Why is writing important?

Reading

1. How would you explain reading - what would you say it is?

2. In your opinion, what should good readers do?

3. Why do you read?

4. Do you think you're a good reader? Why?

5. What's the best way to become a better reader? Why?

Reading Strategies

1. What do you do when you come to a word that you don't know?

2. How do you figure it out?

3. Do you ever find that you don't understand something that you've read?

4. What do you do to try to figure it out? What if that doesn't work?

5. What do you do when you want to remember something you've read? How well does this work?

Studying at Drexel

1. Does your English course help you with your other courses? How?

2. What do you like/not like about your English course?

Questions for the Teacher

1. What do you think about the materials for the course?

2. What are the goals of the course?

3. How do these required materials help the students meet the objectives of the course?

4. What are the problems?

5. What do you think about the students' level and motivation in regard to what is taught?

6. Do the students have any common interests that are addressed in the course of instruction?

7. Are computers available for students' use as part of the course?

8. Do you have any particular educational philosophy in how you choose to approach the teaching of the course?

9. How are the students assessed: initial, progress and final?

10. How do students view this course? Are they embarrassed? Do they see it as helpful? Do they think they need it or are they just fulfilling a requirement?

NOTES

1. David Morley and Ken Warpole, The Republic of Letters, quoted by Rachel Martin in, "Listen to a new word: Publishing from the grass roots," Focus on Basics 2, (2) 1989, p.1

2. Vivien Zamel, "Recent research on writing pedagogy," TESOL Quarterly 21, (4), 1987, p.706.

3. Terry Dean, "Multicultural Classrooms, monocultural teachers," College Composition and Communication 40, (1), 1989, p.23 & 24.

4. Dean, p. 34.

5. Dean, p. 24.

6. Dean, p. 27.

7. Dean, p. 23.

8. Dean, p. 24.

9. Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, The Inheritors: French Students and Their Relation to Culture, quoted by Terry Dean in "Multicultural classrooms, monocultural teachers," College Composition and Communication 40, (1), 1989, p.25.

10. Katherine S. Mangan, "Battle Rages Over Plan to Focus on Race and Gender in U. of Texas Course," The Chronicle of Higher Education, Nov. 21, 1990, p. A16.

11. Mangan, p. A16.

12. Mangan, p. A16.

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3. Lytle, S. and Botel, M. (1990) The Pennsylvania Framework, The Pennsylvania Department of Education.

4. Mangan, K. (1990) "Battle Rages Over Plan to Focus on Race and Gender in U. of Texas Course," The Chronicle of Higher Education, Nov. 21, 1990.

5. Martin, R. (1989) Listen to a new word: Publishing from the grassroots. Focus on Basics 2, (2). pp.1-4.

6. Zamel, V. (1987) Recent research on writing pedagogy. TESOL Quarterly 21 (4).